

Top 5 Tips – How to read non-verbal communication

Supplied by: *The Development Company Limited*

To communicate successfully, it is important for us to realise the effect of non-verbal communication. An awareness will provide us with a level of understanding on others' thoughts and feelings, and give us feedback on our performance as communicators.

We communicate non-verbally in *five* main ways:

1) **Body Position**

Body position can communicate our general state of mind. It is especially important, therefore, to be aware of posture in meetings, negotiations or interviews. Leaning in, sitting back, even chair positions in meetings can either signify “working this out together”, “I am ignoring you”, or “let’s fight!”.

2) **Gestures**

If posture communicates our state of mind, then gestures can transmit the thoughts running through it. At a simple level they are the small hand movements we make whilst talking. At a higher level they are the out-thrust fist of the politician making a point.

3) **Facial Expressions**

The many muscles of the face make facial expressions the most subtle and comprehensive method of non-verbal communication. Some people can conceal their true emotions, and the 'plastic smile' is an example of this duplicity. Observing instant reactions, which are not so easily controlled, can give a lot of feedback about the effect our messages are having.

4) **Head Nods**

Head nods have two distinctive roles.

- i) They are used as a form of non-verbal agreement, *and*
- ii) They give permission for someone to go on talking by saying non-verbally "Yes, go on, I'm with you". This is known as 'continuity behaviour'.

5) **Eye Contact – Our eyes are the window to the soul**

To look at a person is to recognise them. We tend to look at people we like, so that if we look at person A more often than person B, B will eventually feel 'left out'. Most of us when sitting between two people, tend to favour one side rather than the other. This is quite unconscious, but can often give the wrong impression. We feel more comfortable if we are at a slight angle to each other so that eye contact can be made and broken at will. The 'eyeball to eyeball' position forces people to look away from each other and therefore interferes with our normal gaze pattern.

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Eye contact is a powerful tool. To lock eyes with someone whilst making a point may emphasise the importance of that point. It also gives some indication as to whether the point has been understood. Eye contact can also be used to gain attention, especially in a group of people. If you doubt the validity of this, try making eye contact in a crowded lift.

We are constantly subjected to a barrage of non-verbal signals so we might as well make them work for us. Being aware of our own and others body language can make us more effective communicators.

The Development Company provides training, coaching and consultancy to organisations who wish to improve how their people communicate with each other. We provide:

- In-company tailored training courses
- In-company seminars, including large conference seminars
- External coaches for individuals
- Consultancy advice, training and coaching to transform how you communicate
- A communications audit to help you scope, plan, implement and evaluate your communications



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